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ABSTRACT

Since trends in foreign language, especially English as a Second Language (ESL), instruction, move like a pendulum between audio-linguistic and traditional methods, the safest approach by which teachers can respond to the special needs of their students is through individualized instruction. That method maximizes the realization of individual potential and at the same time permits students to make choices which the standard packaged curriculum denies them. Since the purpose of language is social interaction, however, individualized instruction must be balanced by small group (five to nine students) instruction, which provides social contact while maintaining a workable level of individualized assistance. ESL teachers should consider individualized instruction as the appropriate teaching method for their classrooms. (JR)

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Individualized Instruction: An Eclectic Method

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Methodology in the teaching of foreign languages and of English as a second language has been dominated by massive movements in one direction or another. During the 1960's and early 1970's the audio-linguistic method was "in". Current trends indicate that the pendulum is beginning to swing away from this method. Rather than waiting for the development, testing, and failure to meet expectations syndrome for the next panacea to actualize, ESL (English as a Second Lanugage) teachers should analyze the special needs of their clientele and adopt an eclectic methodology that will allow them to deal effectively with each of their students. The method that would most easily permit this is individualization of instruction. To efficiently use individualization, the ESL teacher must understand the definition of the term individualization, the pratical reasons for using individualizated instruction, and the various ways of individualizing an ESL classroom.

The term individualization has been used differently by various authors. Most, however, agree with Altman and Politzer that individualization of instruction can be viewed from the three perspectives of individualizing the goals of instruction, the means of attaining these goals, and/or the speed of attaining these educational goals. Within the classroom "to individualize instruction is to provide each student with the content, pace, and style of learning which in the end will enable him to realize both his intellectual abilities and educational desires."

(10:353) Thus, a variety of curricular experiences with multiple interest and ability ranges are offered within the same time span. The student after counseling with the teacher has some imput into the selection of his learning experiences. Through this process of individualization the student has some responsibility for his program, can have a program which has relevance to him, and can successfully move through a meaningful program at his own rate by capitalizing on his abilities.

Arnold and Taylor point out that people learn a native language by progressing from uttering unintelligible noises to developing meaningful speech in a sequential pattern. However, a different process takes place in learning a second language. The learner already has something to say, but he does not have the language to communicate the message. The new language that the learner needs has its own conscious and subconscious habits. To learn the second language, the student must adopt a new emotional, muscular, or intellectual process. Robert Iado observed that this "is a major undertaking." (2:150) Since each individual enters these difficult learning processes at different stages, individualized instruction would be the most appropriate way to maximize the learning of a second language.

Howard Altman believes that instruction must be individualized and personalized in order to eliminate the repressive institutionalization of schools. Agreeing with John Holt, Altman points out that our schools are very much like jails in that they do not permit voluntary withdrawal, freedom of choice is severely limited, and authority is imposed from above. For Altman the simple method to prevent schools from becoming or

remaining a jail is to individualize and personalize instruction. Each student must be viewed as a unique human being with special needs, abilities, and motivations. Since "we, as teachers, really haven't the faintest notion of how anyone learns anything... (and since) what we do know about learning, however, is that people seem to do it differently, at different rates of speed, for different reasons, with different intensities, under different circumstances," (1:209) individualized instruction offers the best opportunity for each individual to achieve his maximum potential as a human being.

Learning and school experiences should be student centered. Because ESL student have special needs that can be met only by specialized instruction and because these students tend to have multiple problems that have no quick solutions, every phase of ESL instruction should be centered around the students involved. Language instruction "cannot - and should not - attempt to reconstruct the personality of those involved. It should, instead, make an effort to put into use every asset that pupil possess, to strengthen the background that he has already acquired, and to add to his background in a systematic and natural way." (3:407) These goals can be accomplished through individualized instruction which "acknowledges that every student is unique in his learning abilities." (7:19)

There is a large degree of variation in levels of proficiency in acquisition of a second language. Bernard Spolsky identified the method of teaching, the age of the student, and the attitude of the student as a significant factors that influence this variance. Various studies have indicated

different results on the effectiveness of methodology. A 1964 study by Scherer and Wertheimer which compared the audio-lingual to the tracitional method showed that the students trained in the audio-lingual method were better speakers while those students taught by the traditional method were better at writing and translation. In 1968 studies by Smith and Berger and by Smith and Baranige found the traditional method superior in all areas to the audio-lingual approach. Studies by John Upshur and by John Carroll indicate that people learn a language best in a natural environment. Other studies support the concept that the ability to learn a language decreases as a age increases. Concentrating on attitudes, Spolsky pointed out that a person's attitude towards learning a new language is highly correlated with the degree of proficiency that he achieves in that language. If the student views the second language as an "integrative" tool to possible membership in a secondary society, he is more likely to have a positive attitude towards learning. The learners attitude can also be affected by teachers, peers, family, and speakers of the language. Spolsky's observations and conclusions have implications for ESL methodology. Since researchers cannot agree on the best method for teaching a second language, and since age, environment, and attitudes greatly influence an individuals learning, only an eclectic individualized method offers a program with sufficient diversity to meet each student's needs and to match him with the teaching method most compatible with his learning style and abilities.

Many ESL students have an identity crisis because "the majority of ABE/ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

students have experienced failure and frustration in the classroom and in their personal lives because of the economic and social system in which they live." (14:57) Their problems are often compounded by deficiences in both languages. The language program for these people should: give the pupil a feeling of success, be student oriented, increase a student's feeling of belonging and of reassurance of his individual worth, make both languages working tools usable for competing in the world, reinforce the feeling of cultural identity, and make the student more aware of his cultural, traditional, ancestral, and personal roots. (3) Altman's personalized and individualized instruction offers the best method for implementing this type of language program.

Individualization of instruction creates opportunities for the students to make choices in the classroom. "To individualize instruction means to tailor instruction to the needs and interests of learners." (1:210) Instead of the teacher decreeing that a student follow a packaged curriculum, the student is given a degree of choice in selecting his learning experiences. Carroll Londoner believes that the element of choice will make the activity more meaningful by developing the student's sense of personal investment. Mohammed Douglah feels that participation in decision making will increase a student's goal orientation. David McLoughlin found that participation in program planning can have a powerful positive effect on a student's attitude. Thus, the availability of options made possible through individualized instruction and the opportunity for student imput into his program

selection can improve attitudes and participation in an ESL class.

Thus, there are several psychologically sound and pragmatic reasons for an ESL teacher to individualize instruction. Once the decision has been made to adopt this method, there are several ways that the teacher can individualize. The key to a successful individualized program is a wide variety of materials at various levels. Teacher made materials which move away from the textbook allow for the greatest amount of diversification. These materials can be placed at various learning stations throughout the room. Within an eclectic individualized program, the ESL teacher can place materials emphasizing the various methodologies at different learning stations. Each learning station should cover several aspects of a topic, concept, or group of skills. The activities at the learning station must be carefully planned and structured so that they lead to the development of a skill. To allow for quick feedback and continuous uninterrupted progress, the materials should be self-directing and self-correcting. The learning station activities should progress from easy to hard. All students should be able to do the first activities and thus learn the skill. The later activities should serve as reinforcement, practice, or enrichment. In order to place the student at the stations and within the method that will be most beneficial to him, the teacher must diagnose each student's strengths and weaknesses and uncover his needs. After the student has been placed in the proper program, the "teacher bears a responsibility to facilitate student learning, an-

activity taking various forms one of which is conventional 'teaching'". (1:206)

It is, however, impossible to have a successful language program in a situation where all the student's work is done on an isolated or independent basis. The act of speaking a language is the essence of social interaction. The social role of language cannot be overlooked in teaching a language. Therefore, some group work in order to provide an atmosphere of social interaction is required in any realistic language program. Kibbey Horne found that small group size should be limited to less than ten. Because of the difficulty in distinguishing the sounds and facial expression of the teacher when dealing with a non-native language and because of the lack of familiar and environmental clues, the students need to be close to the teacher during periods of oral instruction. Horne suggests that seats be arranged in a single row in an arc of about 120° within four to twelve feet of the teacher. Since Horne found that students in individual groups composed of four or less do not learn any better than in small groups, he recommended that the optimum small group size be between five and nine. He also concluded that "language training is best conducted as a small group learning activity, rather than as individual or mass instruction." (6:195)

By combining learning stations with small group oral activities, the ESL teacher can develop an individualized program. The students can learn new skills and vocabulary at the learning stations best suited for their specific strengths and learning styles. Within the small conversation group, the

students will have a chance to apply what they have learned. The conversation groups should stress application of material in an original and realistic manner. The conversation group should not be used to teach new material but rather to provide an opportunity to recombine the material that has already been learned. Therefore, these conversation groups can also be used as a culminating experience at the end of each unit to practically apply learned material. The non-inhibiting small groups will also increase the student's opportunities to speak in class.

Another means of achieving individualization has been proposed by Robert Morrey. He suggests the use of differentiated staffing. Differentiated staffing means that various members of the staff have different roles and are responsible for different aspects of the program. If the staff is large enough for dividing the duties and if additional para-professional assistance is available, the teachers can work more closely with students in small groups. This increase in individual student contact and the use of conversation groups leads to increased oral fluency.

The faculty at McCluer High School in North St. Louis County individualized by establishing a non-graded performance curriculum which stressed individual learning through small group activities and team teaching. They found that several changes were needed in order to successfully implement this educational plan. The teaching staff had to be differentiated and organized into efficient teams. Teacher functions were agumented to include responsibility for diagnosis of learning

abilities and weaknesses, prescribing remedial learning experiences, guiding conversations, and developing materials. Students had to become more self-directed and assume a greater role in decision making. The methods were changed so that each neophyte student concentrated on just one of the four basic skills of comprehension, speaking, reading, or writing at a time. Each unit was divided into comprehension, vocalization, assimilation, and consolidation activities and presented to instructional groups of four or five students. A great variety and volume of materials were required to meet the wide range of needs and abilities. The classrooms had to be rearranged to handle small groups. Finally, flexible scheduling had to be used. The McCluer Plan allowed the content of the curriculum to remain basically the same but presented it in a more relevant and cogent manner to the students.

Howard Altman believes that reeducation of teachers and students, increased responsibility of students, and program planning based on relevance are necessary prerequisites to individualization in the language classroom. Language teacher training needs to concentrate more on the uniqueness of the individual learner and less on the sterile technicalities of the language itself. Reeducation for the learner means decreasing his total dependence upon teacher direction and recognizing the legitimacy of his own needs and interests. Within the individualized classroom, the teacher has the responsibility to facilitate student learning while the student must bear the primary responsibility for his own learning.

Finally, a relevant curriculum must reflect the needs, interests, and tastes of its target group.

Mary Jackson lists six crieteria for an individualized language program. First each student should be allowed to progress at his optimum pace. Second, students should be tested at frequent levels when they are ready, and they should be permitted re-esamination. Third, the student should have individual assistance from the teacher whenever necessary. Forth, after he has learned the basic constructions, the student should be able to choose his own learning material. Fifth, with the aid of the teacher, the student should be able to select the learning approach most effective for him. Finally, students should be allowed to work both independently and in small groups. Jackson concluded that individualized instruction based on these criteria will "permit achievement of objectives where other techniques fail." (7:19)

Since no precise methodology has been agreed upon by the leaders in the language field and since language teachers have not eagerly accepted diversity in either methodology or curriculum in the past, it is time for ESL teachers to consider individualized instruction as the appropriate teaching method for their classroom. Language teachers have been obsessed with the search for a methodological panacea. "Rather than pursuing the search for the one true faith, we should gather all that is good from various past methods and entertain the possibility of using different approaches with different students." (10:349) Guarding against excessive quantities of self-propelled in-

struction, the teacher must insure that the student is exposed to some group work and that the student develop a peer caraderie. The social nature of language and the uniqueness of the individual mandate that the ESL teacher create a classroom environment which will facilitate language learning by an eclectic integration of individual instruction with other proven techniques.

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